THE

FREE LANCE

VOLUME 1

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INTRODUCTION

Words are the paper and string to package experience, to wrap up from the inside out the poet's concentric waves of contact with the living world. Each poet makes of words his own highly individualized wrappings for life segments he wishes to present. Sometimes the paper and string are more arresting than the contents of the package. Sometimes the poet creates a transparent wrapping revealing with great clarity and from all angles what is inside. Sometimes the word wrapping is clumsy and inept, and neither the inside nor the outside of the package is interesting. Sometimes the word wrapping contains nothing. But, regardless of quality or content, a poem reveals always the poet as a person. Skilled or unskilled, wise or foolish, nobody can write a poem, without revealing something of himself. Here are people. Here are poems. Here is revelation.

—Langston Hughes

The **FREE LANCE**

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APARTMENT 31

Up, up the stairs
this way please.
Follow the red glare
of two dusty bulbs.
Knock on this door loudly,
admit authority.
Do not look with pity
on these children of emaciation.
Hunger is always hollow
and hovering death leaves no pretty smell.
Stop ears with cotton of indifference
to a pregnant mother's groan;
These half-fleshed skeletons
are documents, routine statistics
for a black notebook.
Your duty first—
brass over bone—
arrest!
Seize this man swaddling in darkness
(Is he the husband?)
Let moist eyes turn to stone—
Many sheep stray shepherdless.
(Is she the wife?)
No matter,
it was he who plunged the knife
to steal his bloody bread.
(The children are not fed?)
Be stone hard crisp efficient;

(*continued*)

Arrest
but swiftly; let the night
decide the issues, and
the cinch-infested hall
be their wailing wall!

II

Why do I return
to the dead sound tracks
of my youth? Here the old sweet-sour stench
of cabbage plays violent harp music
with my senses.
Once more I try a bold incisive entry
into (cinch-infested) halls,
apartment thirty-one
(a cipher in the syndicate of F&M, inc.)
The door's blank stare
invites my challenge;
yet the will lies numb—
I stand still, paralyzed.
Why have I not full growth at all?
These tailored clothes,
these sleek new shoes,
do they not fortify me?
Why do I shrink, my view dilated
to a pin-point camera?
I who was proud, so tall, so tall,
why is it that I have not grown at all?

—*Helen J. Collins*

MOOD

When the snow is lying deep upon the earth,
When ponds are suitably frozen, firmly frozen,
The soul sits brooding like a crow in the woods.
The moon is cold, the moon is thin;
Ideals are wrapped in the same (expressionless,
commonplace)
Inhabitations;
The winter is delaying decay;
The white, the negative of perfect emptiness,
Has my eyes bleeding, pleading.
Time and the world are a voiceless sphere of ice,
As silent, as still. . .

—Jerry Davis

A SINNER KISSED AN ANGEL

A sinner kissed an angel
between the bar and the olive grove,
No one noticed there the speechless
mandolin player
Winding a song from the stars.

—Jerry Davis

TRINKETS

A crinkled rose pressed
Within a moulded diary:
What tales they tell
Of ancient love:

A kiss, a vow passionately stressed
Between two secret lovers,
Till father's footsteps fell
And scorn fell from above.

—*Madison Wood*

BACK YARDS

In a well-kept back yard on an Autumn day,
Tenderly tending yellow roses,
Like fragile gems, a dimpled woman
Saw me watching her, and asking me to rest,
Pushed me a cool seat, and began to say:
"Having such a yard so far from the street
May seem odd; having front-yard flowers
Growing in the back as well as in the front.
But, it was Moses' wish before he died.
Someone's going to see the back yard some
time,

He said. And I would like for them to find
It as they found the front. And our neighbors',
Whether theirs be kept as well or not,
Do also have back yards that look into ours."

—*Madison Wood*

SUMMARY

The summer ends——the leaves at last must fall,
The brightness of those golden days be spent.
The naked trees stand silent on the Mall,
And snow must hide the paths where once we went.
Beyond the bluff, the lake is calm and blue;
One lone gull mars the emptiness of sky.
Reflecting now the earth's autumnal hue,
The pageant of the summer passes by.
But do not doubt that Spring will come again
In all its former glory as of old,
And bring a freshness to the world of men
Though autumn spread her silks of red and gold.
But who shall bring sweet Springtime to impart
A brightness to the winter of the heart?

—*James Liotta*

THE BEAUTICIAN

There were only two of us here,
Mrs S. and me,
And for years we got the ladies
Ready for church
On Sunday, and pretty for parties
On holidays.
Who is to say our lives were in vain?
Many a happy hour we gave
Darktown's husbands and beaux,
Even if they did seek out Mary and Sue
Over on J Street,
Long after the witching hours
When the pretty ladies were asleep.

—Finley B. Nix

THE MUSIC TEACHER

I was a teacher here in the village.
For years I taught the youngsters of Darktown
The prim classics of Chopin,
Liszt, Mendelsohn, and the rest.
How much they rebelled I never knew
Until I came here to sleep the long, long sleep
Of the dead, for all my prize pupils
In winning the plaudits of the world,
Won them through the Blues, Spirituals, and
Lamentations
That rose out of the bewildered souls
Of our ancestors.

Sound on, you young Americans,
While the world listens, for through me
You make music for the ages,
And I content myself with waiting
In this silence, where your tones may reach me,
But where I can chide you
No more.

—Finley B. Nix

SONNET

So spent was she with grief, so lost in gloom,
So apprehensive of a creaking stair,
And terrified when darkness seized her room,
They thought she would not go on living there.
It therefore happened when she closed her door
And drew her blinds, they marvelled at her mood;
But finding it forever, fluttered now—
A vicious circle of solicitude.
Thus legends grow and village streets become
Shadowed with mystery, and there is time
Around a soul gone blind and deaf and dumb,
Semantics builds the Punishment and Crime.
Behind a shuttered window burns what hell?
Who knows? The village wiseman cannot tell.

—Mary B. Landgrabe

BLUE-EYE PSYCHOLOGY

She is a maiden
perspicacious,
though her eyes are
azure blue--
apparently a
trick of color
to color the eye
of him seen through.

—Mary B. Landgrabe

SCARLET ROSE

All the flowers of summer gone,
All the bloom of autumn too;
Lifting up its heart is one,
One scarlet rose . . For you?

Shall we leave it blowing there
Alone among the blowing leaves?
Or shall we pin it in your hair
As the last the year bequeaths?

Still your beauty blooms and glows
Though the winter comes apace.
Shall we leave the scarlet rose
For a garden's aging face?

—Mary B. Landgrabe

REINCARNATION

If I can come back here to earth,
And choose my favorite form of birth,
Perhaps I'll come the first of spring,
Small as a dot,
For-get-me-not.

If it is summer, I'll be
A golden glow,
And you will know.

In autumn, look for me, my dear,
Among our chums,
Chrysanthemums.

If you are waiting in the clay
Until your winter melts away,
I'll plant myself within your heart—
Though memories close—
A Christmas rose.

—Ruby Baker Tillman

A LADY IN MASQUERADE

Just so long as time is moving
She moves too—
Boldly—Ever onward to some new

Hope in dreams. Though drenched with rain
She sways with poise,
For the echo of that musical noise

Hides from all the sight and sound of dripping
Sorrow——part
Of the storm of things within her heart.

—Ruby Baker Tillman

'ENCHANTRESS'

Hoarse seductive laughter
sits heavily on leathered stools;

Thick powder and lipstick smudge,
blackened eyebrows,
lean lightly on well-worn elbows.

Moist-manicured fingers
never still;
one to pour, another
to pay, yet another to drink it up.

False diamond glitter;
Henna-dyed hair,
reflecting dingily;
Teeth smudged (nicotine)
give insincere smile;
Hackneyed beauty in
pockmarked skin—

I am 'enchanted'.

—*Matt Wilson*

FRIGID WARMTH

Summer comes
alone this year.
Listen! low laughter
murmuring,
voices speak delusion.

Temperate breath gives
comfort to fear.
Summer comes without
its cheer,

Made ignoble in defeat
by a wintry career:
Frosted heart's the only
delicacy.
Summer's change of menu
is the winter's
change of venue.

—*Matt Wilson*

GOSSIPS

Three little women
Sitting in a corner

Knowing nothing

The great wide world
Stretched out before them

They saw nothing

Heads bent together
Wagged in empty harmony

The world grew smaller
The sky closed in
And stuffed their mouths
with cotton clouds

Three little women
Dead in the corner
Venom from their empty brains

Floating free in the skies

—*Vera Steckler*

I HEAR MUSIC

Exhausted and weary,
I hear music;
I tire no more.

Perplexed and confused,
I hear music;
Pain is banished.

At last in serenity
I hear music;
I am calm, I am calm!

—*Rose Davis Greene*

TO A JEALOUS WOMAN

Heir to a throne of unscrupulous cunning--
Addicted to the drug of a distorted impulse--
Tormented with a cancer of concealed remorse--
Shielded by a screen of fallacious smiles--
Belted with a rope of crafty deceit--
Camouflaged in a garment of shrewd subtlety--
Unseen, like the deadly germ that creeps in darkness--
Your treacherous web of depraved emotions becomes
a perpetual snare for blinded victims
who vainly squirm for release!

—*Erma D. McLemore*

THE GLORY OF SILENCE

What balm there is in the mute salve of nature's
grandeur.
Here flowers gently unlock their buds, quietly
adorning and soothing the outside world.
Without a murmur white velvet calmly decks the
still earth
Of mountains, valleys, plains.
There is no noise when the generous earth nur-
tures trees
that they may not otherwise blithely climb
to the sky with regal calmness.
Not a sound is heard when the moon and stars
make each course
to their respective parts of the heavens.
The sun, giver of light and warmth, and the
planets too
Move in majestic tempo of stillness,
Thus—the most glorious song of all nature
is that of silence.

—Erma Deloris McLemore

RECKONING

It's night--
a man living:
the weather crowded
with star-light eyes,
popping eyes,
nosey eyes, searching eyes
reading his every act:
native but ugly, sociable but
dirty--
It's a hazy age;
It's a green sin--
"He's a good devil."

It's dawn—
a liar living:
the weather crowded
with tainted perfume;
a woman's flattery
lusty but lousy.
Her man found her cheating--
A spare lover
retreading the path
he pioneered;
reloving the love
he begot,
Using a used thing--

It's a hazy age—
It's green sin—
"She's a good devil."

—*Charles Jordan*

RESONANCE

How like a fool's have my pleasures been.
Emotions and sentiments juggle my mind--
unbalanced they leave me;
If proof be the cause to balance the scales,
weigh me, I plead;
balance me, I pray.
Out of this dungeon we harvest a light—
"Sensations are pre-tensed;
understanding is pre-judged."
My heart plunges into life,
there like a fire it flames to glory:
ladies, like a museum of floral art
model the fashions of love;
music, like a character of tears and smiles,
paints the tempers of conscience;
nature, like a divine myth,
foretells my worldly eternity—
How like a fool's have my pleasures been.

—*Charles Jordan*

THE BORE

There's one thing really vexes me
Until I'm downright sore,
When listening to the dull remarks
Of some depressing bore.

He thinks I'm looking paler now—
Should give my Doc a ring.
For hours he will talk and talk
And never say a thing.

He thinks the war will last for years,
And pities G. I. Joe.
He thinks 'bout this and thinks 'bout
that,
But never thinks to go.

He talks himself up to the door,
Then tells me 'bout his job.
He turns his bosses inside out,
But never turns the knob.

A walking 'cyclopedia.
Most everything he knows.
A dozen times he says, "Good-bye,"
But never ever goes.

I hope, my friend, with all my heart,
You'll never be forced to grieve,
By one who takes the world apart,
But never takes his leave.

—*Jane Allen*

THE OLD HOME BY THE SEA

The old house stood for years in the reeds;
The windows were out and the doors ajar,
The floors were warped and the walls bent in.
The wind whistled through and the noise came in;
There were toys in the attic where children once played
Mother and father to the dolls which they made.

In the backyard tucked under the shed
Stood an old vehicle near an old well;
The top was rotted and the cushions soaked with stain,
But the old frame still waited in the rain. . .

—B. Helen Dobbins Dobbs

LOVE

Would I love you if I could,
could I love as I should?
I don't know. . .
nor too much care,
love is universal,
love is everywhere?

—Budd Martin

Excerpts from
DE PARSON AN' HIS PARISH

He's de preachin'est ol' preacher
  Dat I'se ever wants to meet,
An' he talks so long 'bout nuthin
  I starts squirmin' in my seat.
He jes paces an' he hollers
  Till you think he'll never stop;
An' he jumps an' throws his arms out
  Like dat downtown traffic cop.

Well, sir, how dey hoops an' hollers
  An' 'gins jumpin' all about,
An' considers me a *devil*
  'Cause I'm sittin' dis one out.
But I'm eyein' Brother Baker
  As de spirits in him grow—
Since he's lookin' all aroun' him
  While he's prancin' to an' fro.

I was gettin' quite suspicious
  Of dat brother, but folks say
When de Spirit gets to movin',
  It jes' has to have its way.
Said dat folks ain' realizin'
  How de Spirit made 'em do
An' when it had started flowin'
  Dey's helpless till it's through.

Now my Lucy was a shouter,
An' it's plain for me to see
Dat she aint know what she's doin',
'Cause she's sometimes huggin' *me*!
But dis brother dat I mentioned
Got such pleasure from his grace,
Dat he'd throw his arms to heaven,
So's dey'd flop 'roun' Lucy's waist.

So I ups an' tells dis Baker
Dat I thought it mighty queer
How he'd always seek out *Lucy*
When de Holy Ghost was near.
Tol' him dat I thought he wasn't
So dern clever or so slick,
An' to quit embracin' Lucy,
'Cause I'se on to dat ol' trick.

Well, he looked at me right crazy,
An' in pity shook his head;
Seems he couldn't quite get over
Dis here awful thing I said.
But dis brothers' sense stayed wid him
An' I'se swearin' from dat day,
When my Lucy shouted towards him,
He jes curved de other way!

—*Harvey LeRoy Allen*

MY EYES BEHELD

My eyes beheld
since seeing you
first a sun
and last a moon.

You were not there
and where you would have been
was darkness.

—*Madison Wood*

DIAGNOSIS: LONELINESS—
CURE: TIME

First, a poignant, searing ache
Somewhere inside.

A full, yet void bubble swells,
Then bursts, with the passing of a second.

A seething joy, pierced with a bolt of fear,
Fear that the rapture is ended,
That its sweetness is forever gone,
Drowned in forgetfulness—
Loneliness at its crisis.

Then a quietness,
All tumult subdued—
Now a dauntless smile at the loss.

—*Beatrice Augustus*

IN THE IMPOSITIVE PHENOMENAL
(What do you read, my lord?)

In the impositive phenomenal, you ascertain
the dominant hyper-conclusive condition
of hysteria: the unrational fixed matter
for that delirium entertaining the successive
forces.
The interpretive multiple might delay
that unrational instantaneous association of
hysteria
and yet it frames the average on a more con-
tingent
and interdependent basis that the reciprocal
refragable material denotes thereby
relative amorphism—or intuitive
amorphous selective superiority
called athanasia.

—*Russell Atkins*

ON A 'BEAUTEOUS' SCENE
(or more yes approximately)

'You see' I said 'wherein the Beautiful (etc) trust
not (what?
The rest you know.
(She thought everything beautiful)
Ah, these bowers!
And to have had a corpse buried in them:
A fresh-from corpse buried a year.
You just can't begin to believe?
But I shouldn't have said should I?

(continued)

You love the Beautiful don't you?
That sex madman—you remember?
He raped her here.

Such a mass of
(you know only God can make them)
trees
!

—*Russell Atkins*

NIGHT AND A DISTANT CHURCH

Forward abrupt up
the smmm mm
wind mmm m
mmm
upon
the smm mm
wind mmm m
mmm
into the smm wind
rain now and again
the smm wind
ell s
b
ell s
b

—*Russell Atkins*